27 July 72

Harold -

I write this by hand because I do not want to disturb anyone with the noise of a typewriter. I am at home now and it is getting late.

Notwithstanding that it is late and that inadvertently, while reading, I went deep into a bottle of scotch, my wits are sharp. I have things to say respecting Wecht and the disappointment you suffered over the actions of Gary and Jerry. What I say may hardly be wise; it may to some extent be welcome. Understand, however, that, be it unwise or unwelcome, it is — as always — well meant.

Jerry phoned me this evening, and we spoke for half an hour or so, touching on all recent events. Ostensibly he called in order to find out whether I had sent a copy of my monograph on the head fragments to Wecht (I had), but I knew, of course, that he wanted to talk about other things too, so we did. Afterward I read all my recent mail from you and Howard, Gary and Jerry, and from Wecht, too. By chance I had these in my briefcase, for I intended to write, but delayed because I felt uncertain about what was going on, relying as I did on the scattered details and sometimes cryptic statements that came to me. I was not sure that I knew enought to speak sensibly about it. I feel more assured now, however, not so much from talking with Jerry as from finally getting everything into my head at one time and, at last, thinking about it.

First on Howard and the concern that you expressed in your recent letter. There is, it seems to me, no real cause for concern. If he feels extreme disappointment, even anguish, over this miserable situation, then his response is natural. Indeed, I would worry greatly

about him if he felt otherwise, for it's a response that's called forth not merely by his affection for you, nor merely by his respect for your judgment (If he were affected only by these, then he would indeed be immature.), but — most important — by the situation itself and his good sense in understanding it. He wrote to me a few weeks ago explaining — not fully, but sufficiently — the situation regarding Wecht and Gary and Jerry. My own failure fully to understand what is happening (I have been somewhat distracted by a personal matter) caused me not fully to understand what he said. But it's clear now that he has a sound and sensible grasp of things. If the things themselves call for anguish, then it's unnatural not to feel it. With such a grasp as his, based as it is on good sense and — I think — a fair assessment of the situation, he will cope well with this disappointment. I have no doubt of that, and no worry over it.

"Inexcusable" is not a term that I would readily apply to the action of Gary and Jerry in sending the Buckley death certificate to Wecht. In fact, I would strenuously resist such a term. I wish that I could resist it now. Gary's arguments in his 28 June letter to you seem, at first, reasonable beyond reproach, except that he fails to mention what seem to me to be the two most pressing points in this matter: that there is no reason whatever for Wecht to know the contents of the death certificate (for Wecht's limitations will, at best, cause him to function only as an experienced observer of things that have already been observed); and — what seems to point more to guilt than merely to blame — that they passed the certificate behind your back, without telling you what they planned to do, or what they had done. This would seem to indicate that they acted not in ignorance of your wishes, but fully

knowing that you would disapprove. I am not here going to refer to the question whether disapproval was warranted (though I think it was, largely on grounds that the certificate can have meant little, if anything, to Wecht as an observer, that it was unnecessary for him to see the certificate, though it meant much to you); rather, I refer to the question whether they knew beforehand that you would disapprove. Surely they did. I would think more of them if they had argued with you about it beforehand, and even acted against your wishes after arguing about it. If that were the case, I might well attribute their action to a mistake in judgment, or — who knows? — I might even have sided with them. But as it is, I can see only conscious deception for the purpose of covering guilt. Under the circumstances, much as I deplore it, "inexcusable" seems appropriate. That pains me, but I feel that it is true.

Having concurred that the business is inexcusable, I shall, with deplorable inconsistency, make a plea for excuse. I urge you to temper your own anguish, your own wrath at them, however justifiably you may be moved to anguish and wrath. It's far easier to forgive a lapse of judgment than a lapse of friendship, I know, so the effort cannot be easy. But the lapse of friendship needs forgiveness much more than the lapse of judgment. After all, I'm mindful that I myself may more than once have been guilty of such lapses — both of judgment and of friendship — and it would grieve me to be cut off as Gary and Jerry are cut off. I'm a sour enough person that I don't usually call for magnanimity in cases where it seems utterly undeserved, but I would call for it here, not because it is in the least deserved (for it is not), but because it is greatly needed. I don't know whether it is possible for you, or anybody, to cut them off from trust without also cutting them off also from friendship (the two, after all, seem to go together), but if there is a measure of friendship that does not

involve deep trust, and if it's possible for you to maintain such friendship, then I urge you somehow to try. Here I am thinking not so much of their benefit as of yours — and perhaps even of my own. If you can have friends without bestowing complete trust on them, then have them.

Wecht wrote a while ago first to thank me for sending him my monograph, then to solicit my advise and invite me to attend a meeting in the evening after he goes to Archives for the first time and before he goes the second time. I have not yet replied. The only advice that I would offer (as I have told Sylvia and others who are in touch with him) is that he should insist on seeing all the pictures and X-rays, and not merely those that the Panel and Rathtimer saw. Otherwise, it would be best for him to see nothing. I feel sure that the most revealing material (from our standpoint) has been culled from the collection, probably by Dr. Fisher.

If it were easy for me to get to that meeting on the evening of 9 August, I would probably go, though right now I can't see for what reason, unless it is to insist that he see everything that was made, and perhaps to temper the proceedings. But in any case, it will be very difficult for me to get away. This trip to N.J. is a needed, much needed, vacation for my wife, and I can't turn it into a business trip for me. It would simply be ruinous if I did. Please understand, and don't press me too hard. I would like to come down and see you, but I think that I cannot. Perhaps later in the summer, but not during this trip to N.J.

Jerry's description of his action concerning the death certificate was not essentially different from that of Gary. I bluntly disclosed my disfavor, and gave sufficient reasons — as best I could, considering that I was

somewhat confused, and that I had not really thought carefully about the matter. The conversation ended on amiable terms. Probably I'll not write to him about it, though my thoughts now are a good deal more elaborate than they were when I spoke with him. There just seems no use, and I don't want to incite protracted discussion over this, the more so because it cannot now be undone. I may, however, write to Gary.

Probably, too, I'll write to Wecht and tell him that I think that he should examine nothing unless he can examine everything.

Howard will get a copy of this letter.

Ramparts ran a short report of the Gervais affair. I'll send you a copy of it when I can get it to a copying machine. Possibly, too, I'll write to CBC for a transcript of the interview, if they aired it on TV.

I must stop now, for, as you can imagine, it is very late.

Still,

Dick